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SEVERUS BAR SHAKKO'S *POETICS*, PART II

By Martin Sprengling
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The text here published constitutes the second half of Severus bar Shakko's treatise on *Poetics*, which in turn forms Book 3 of his encyclopedic *Dialogues*. The first half was published by Martin (cf. the previous number of this *Journal*). It contains, after a brief introductory paragraph: (1) two general questions and their answers, in which the subject-matter of poetics is divided into four parts: meter, rhyme including assonance, *gebuljå* (the figures of speech and the figurative style in general of poetry), and *tašʿīꝑå* (properly the plot or story underlying a poem); (2) five questions and answers on meter; (3) three similar sections on matters pertaining to rhyme and assonance. The second half contains six questions and answers on *gebuljå* and its subdivisions, one on *tašʿīꝑå*, one each on comedy and tragedy, and one on the difficulties of the "art" of poetry, followed by a few concluding remarks.

Throughout this second part the work of Severus exhibits the same slipshod and harum-scarum character as in the first; it is scarcely too much to say that for the most part he does not know what he is talking about, but insists on talking nevertheless. In spite of this there are sound reasons for the publication of this as well as of other parts of Severus' work. A proper study of Syriac poetics demands at least knowledge of what native masters and students of the subject thought and said. Together with Martin's work and Antonius Rhetor's *Poetics*, published in the previous number of this *Journal*, the following pages will put into the hands of occidental scholars a text, however poor, of all that native writers, belonging to the post-classical period of Syriac literature before the era of printed books, are known to have written *in extenso* and *ex professo* on the subject. Secondly, slipshod work and all, the writings of Severus are a representative factor of the civilization of the age, region, and community to which he belonged. A few sections

of his *Dialogues* have been examined from this point of view by A. Baumstark, *Aristoteles bei den Syrern,* by J. Ruska, *Das Quadrivium aus S. b. S. Buch der Dialogue* and "Studien," *ZA*, XII (1897) and by A. Merx, "Historia Artis grammaticae apud Syros" (*Abh. f. d. K. d. M.*, IX, 2). But the study of Severus' relations to Greek, Hellenistic, Byzantine, and Arabic writers is not yet complete, and its completion is largely dependent upon the publication of his works. Finally, the professed quotations in the text here published are not without value. The most important, that from Aristotle's *Poetics,* has been published and studied in D. S. Margoliouth's *Analecta Orientalia.* The others, no small number, have not all been located, much less studied. Any aid in the finding of these, as well as other assistance, publicly or privately given, will be greatly appreciated by the writer.

The manner of this publication is conditioned by the fact that it is much easier and less expensive in this country to print Syriac in zinc etching than in type. This being the case, and the attempt to edit a definitive text from one manuscript only, when others are known to exist, being hazardous, it is about as well that for purposes of collation looking toward a definitive edition the text of one manuscript should be published as it stands, errors and all. What follows, is the text of the Harvard manuscript, heretofore described in this *Journal.*

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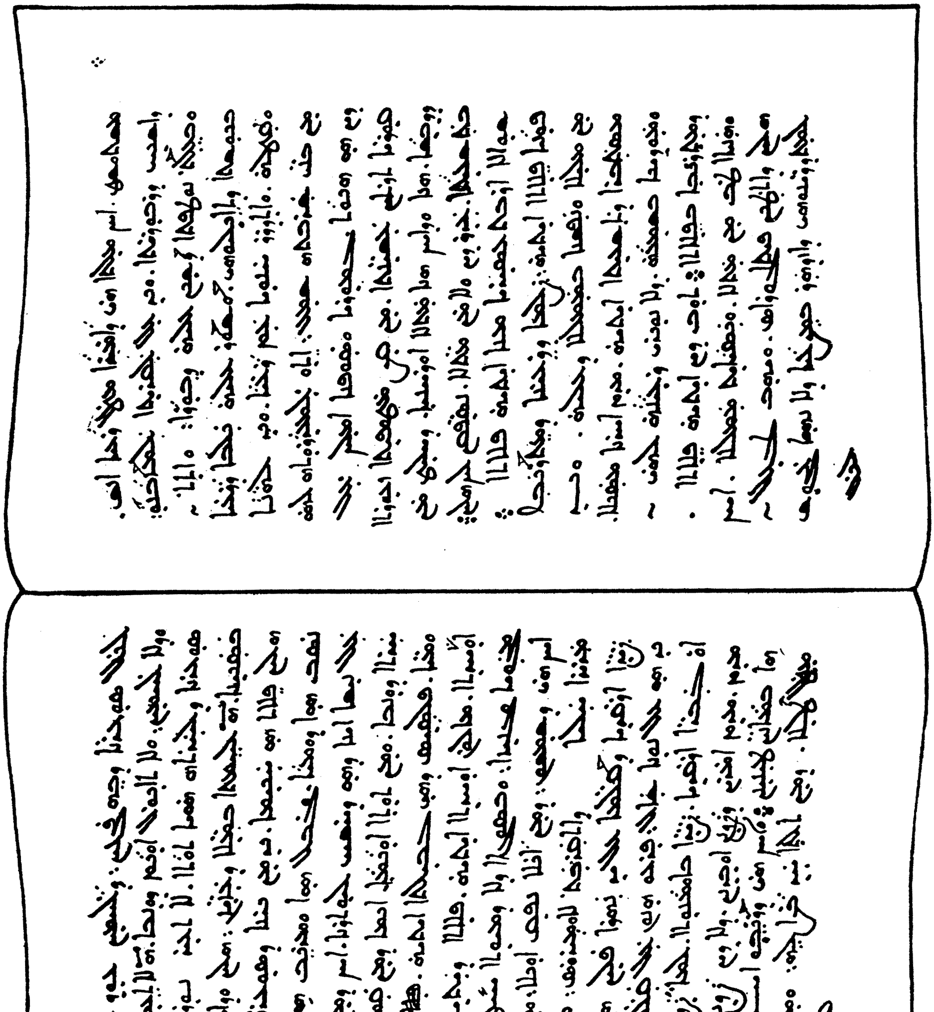

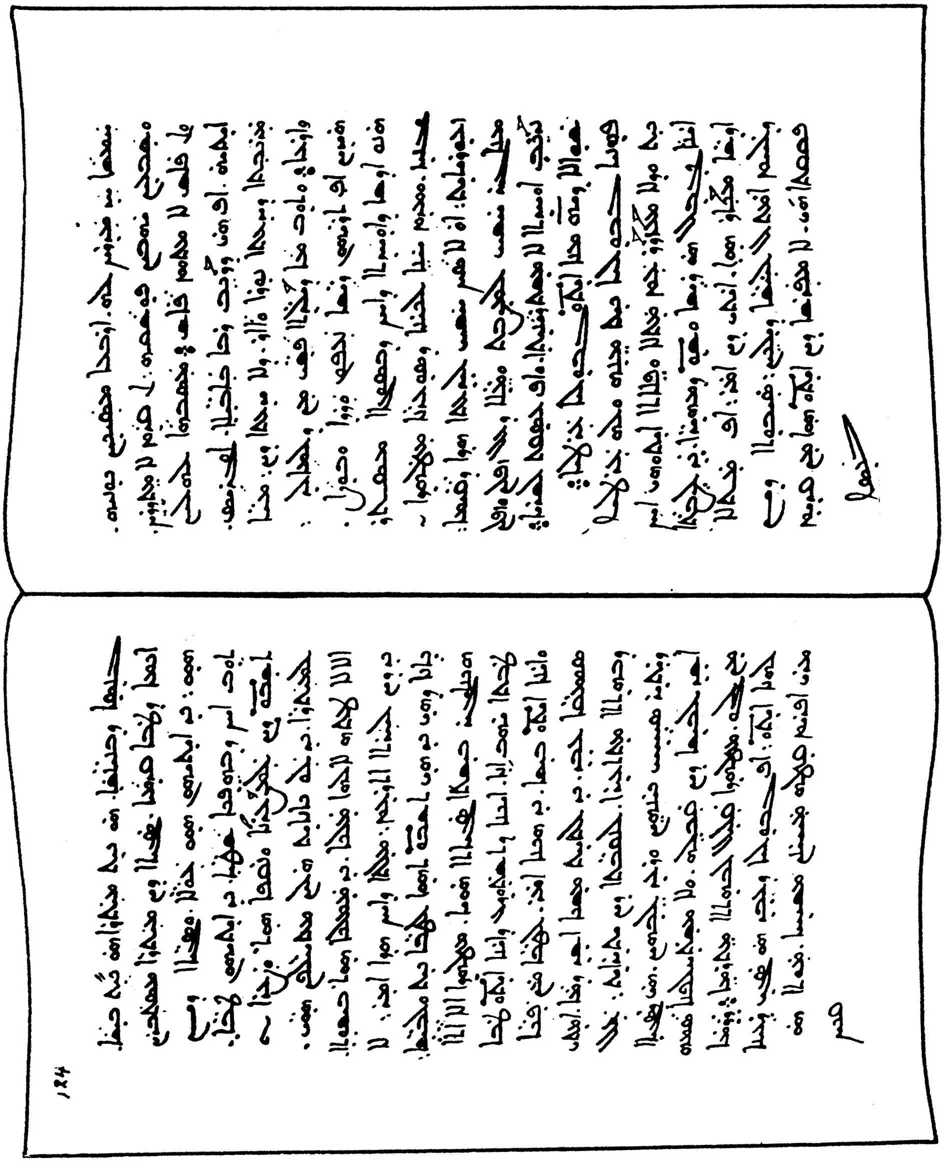

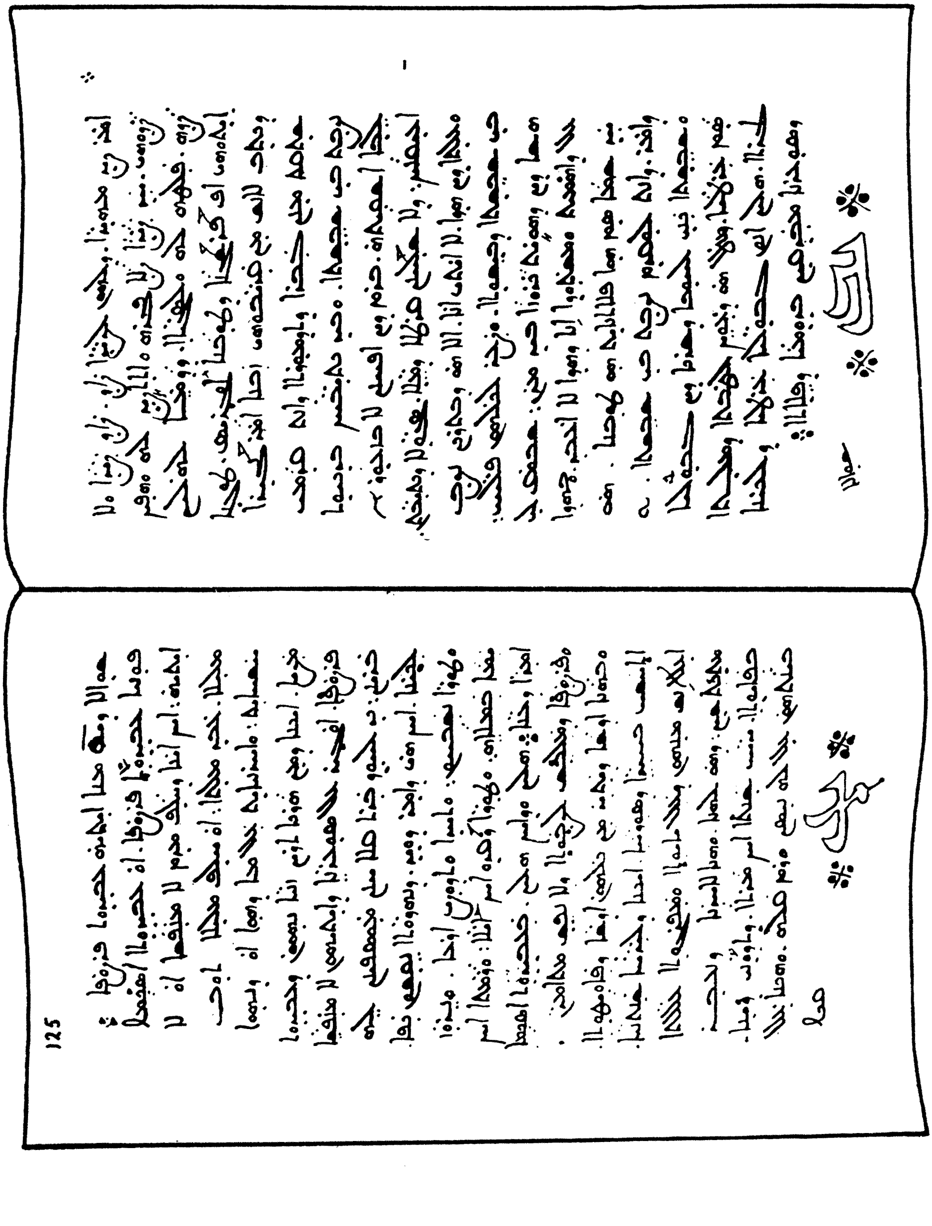

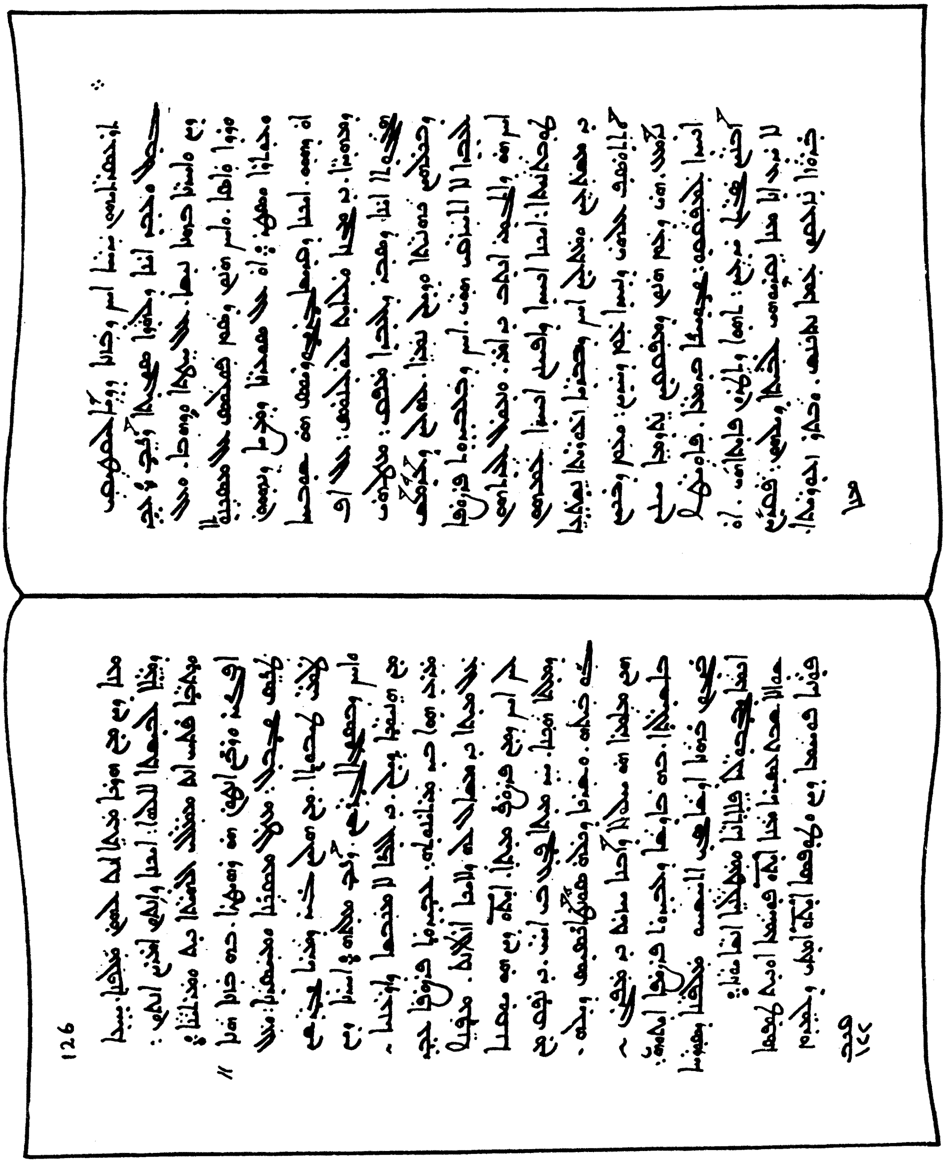

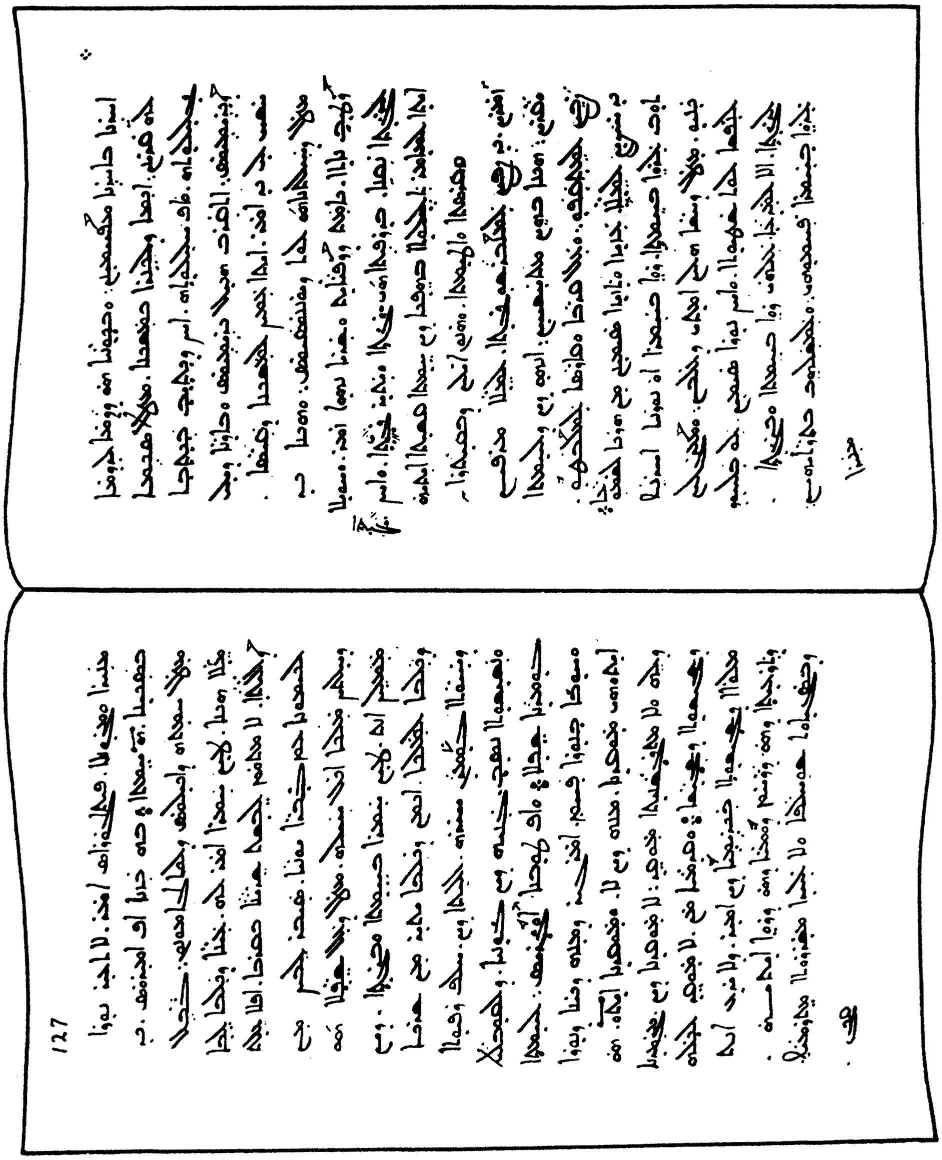

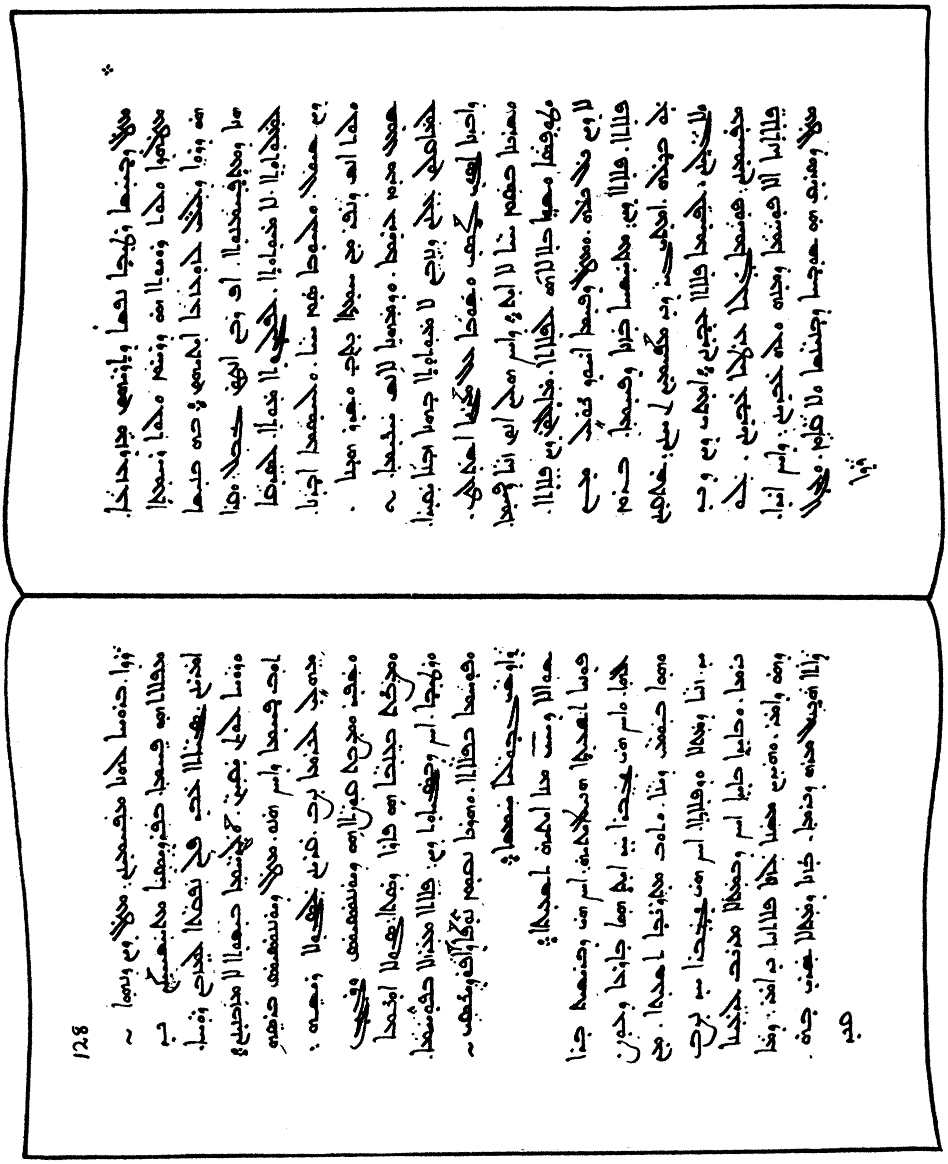

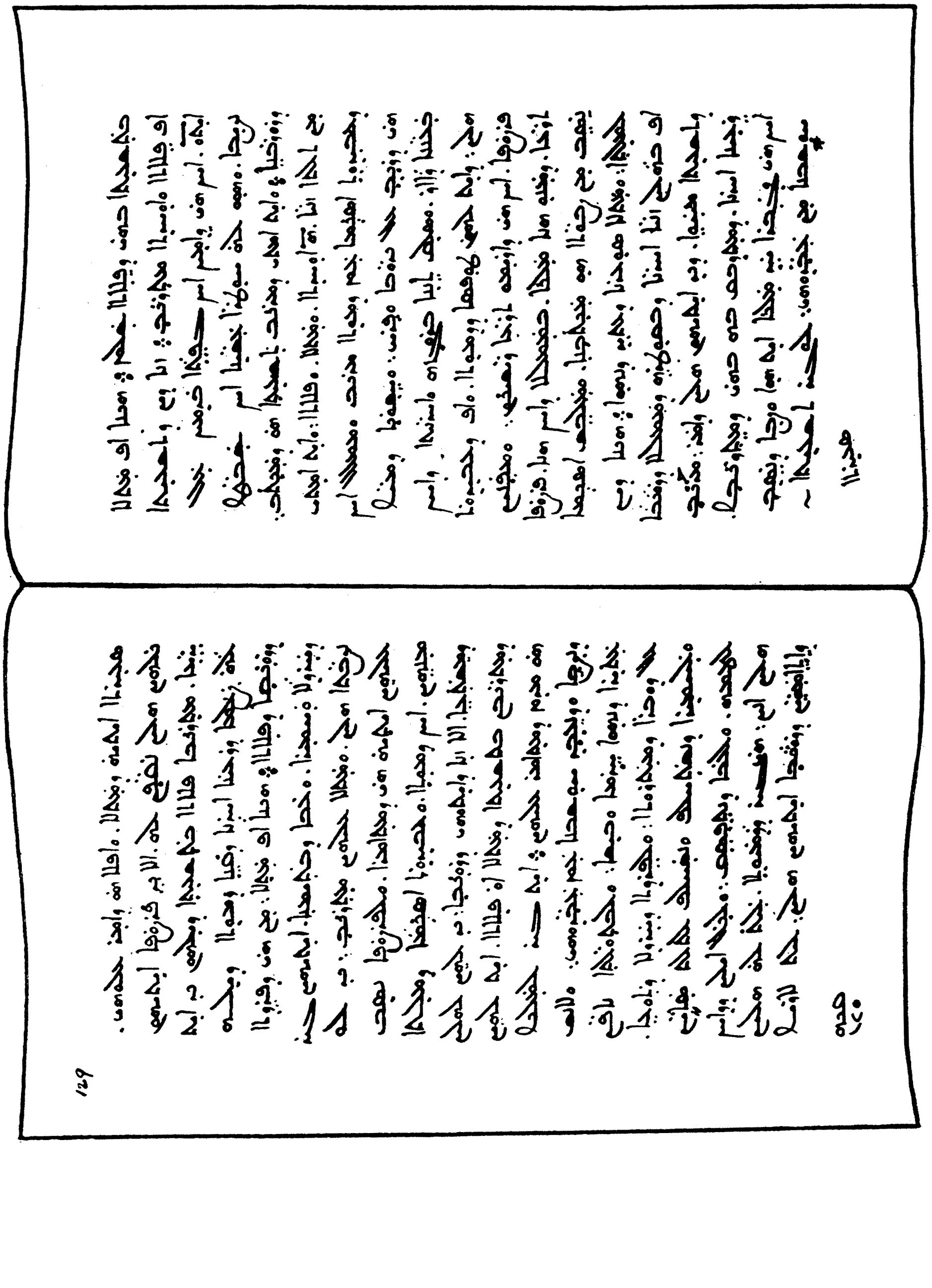

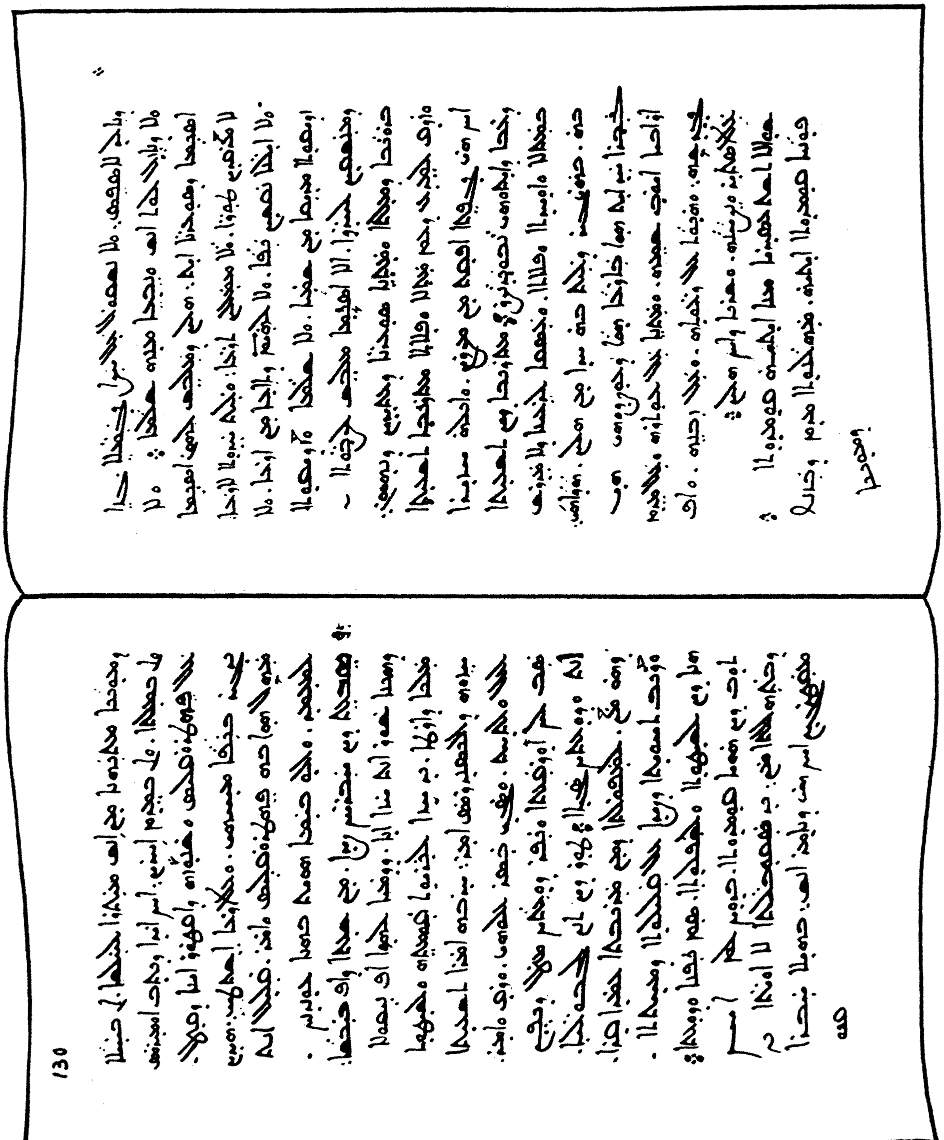

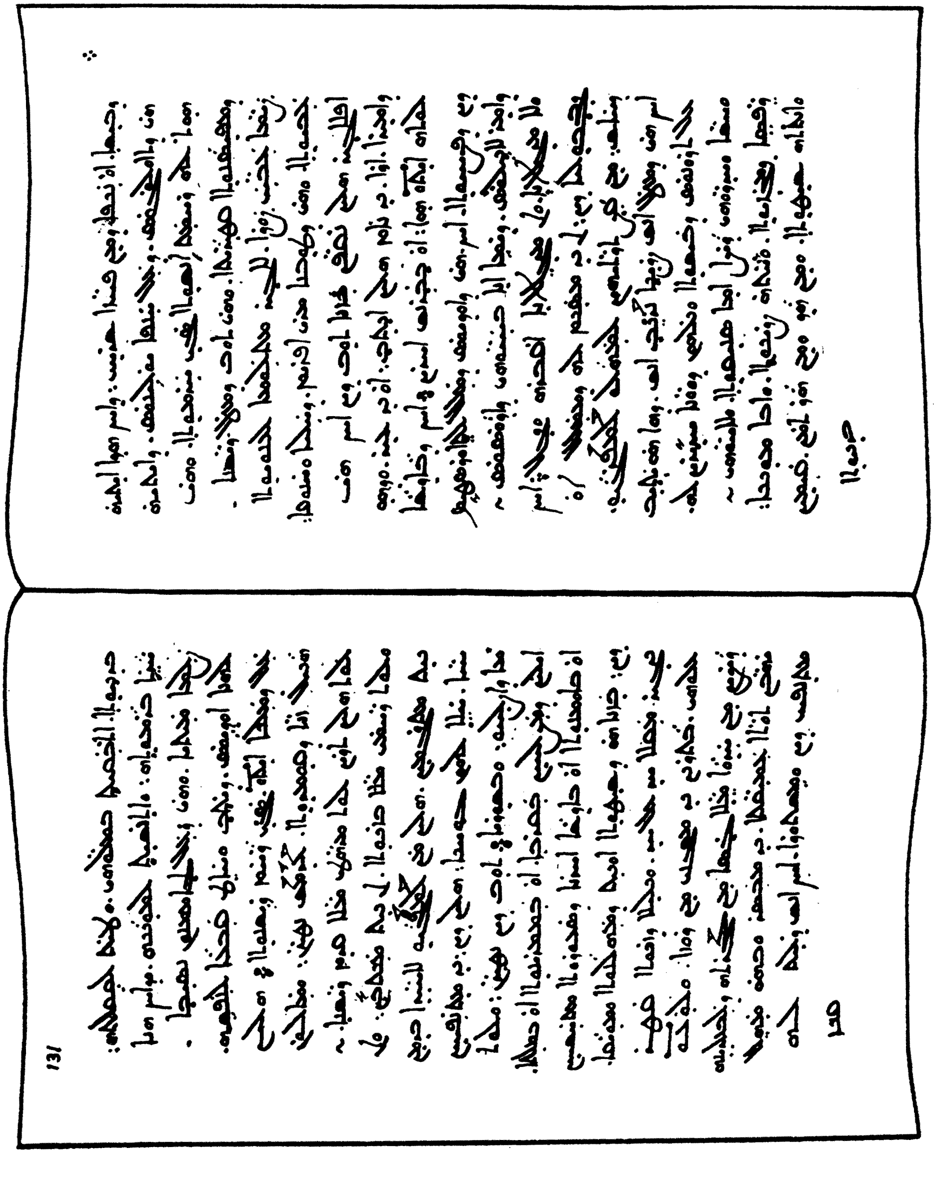

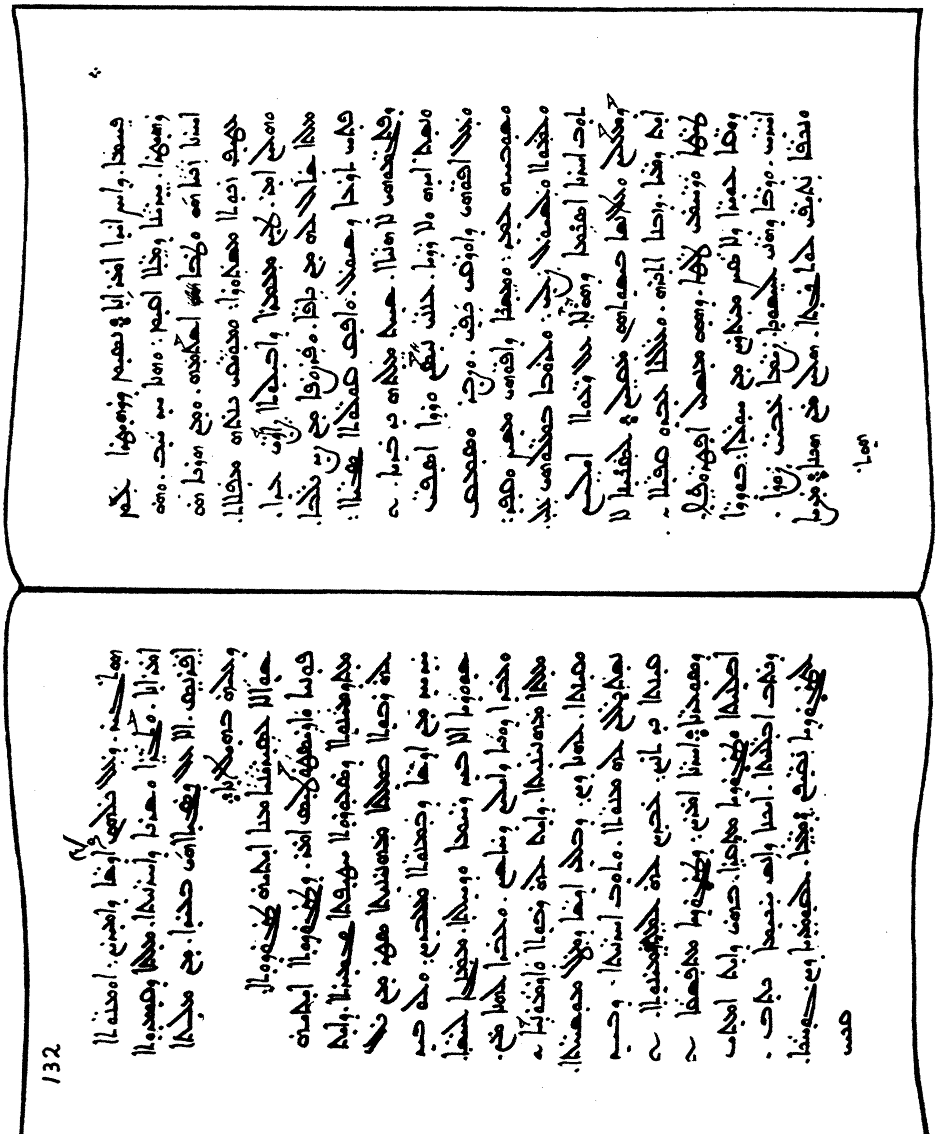

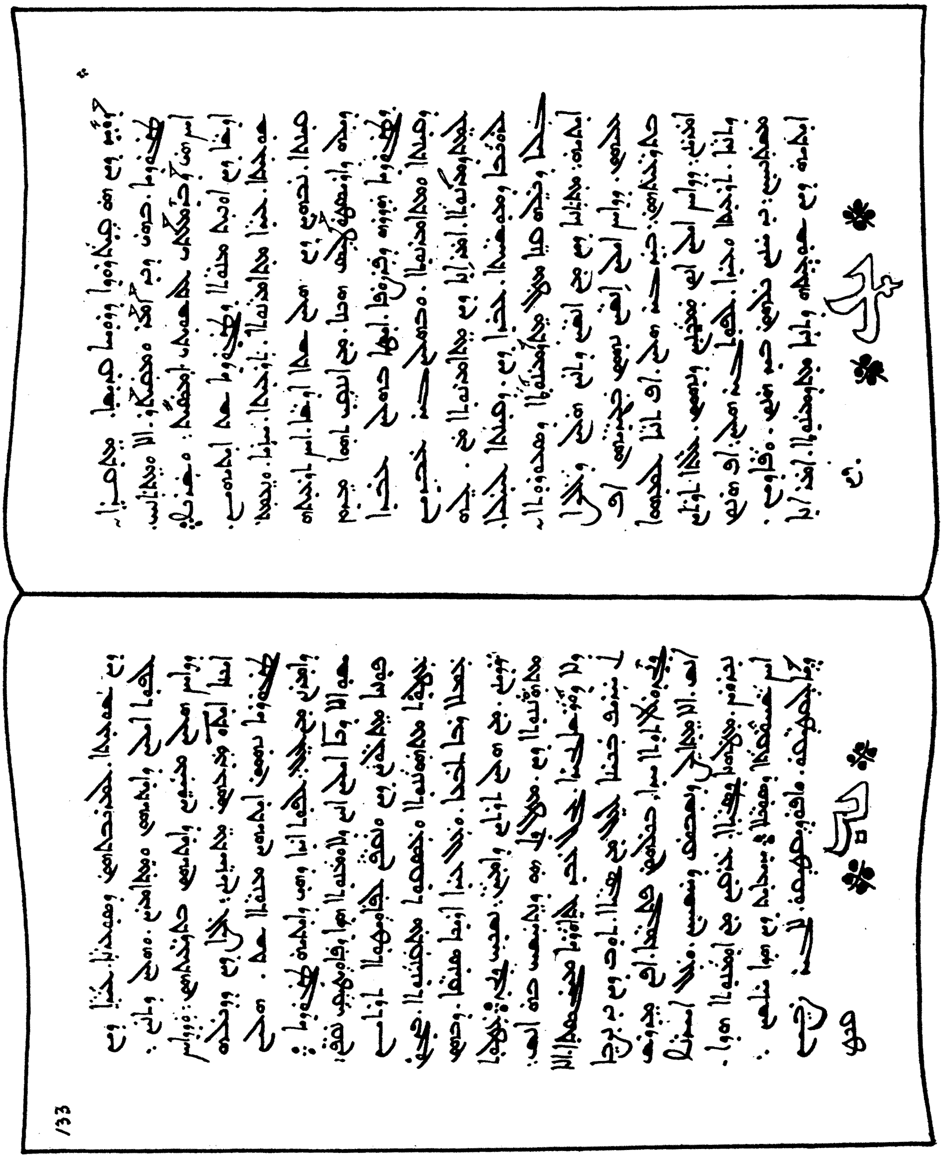

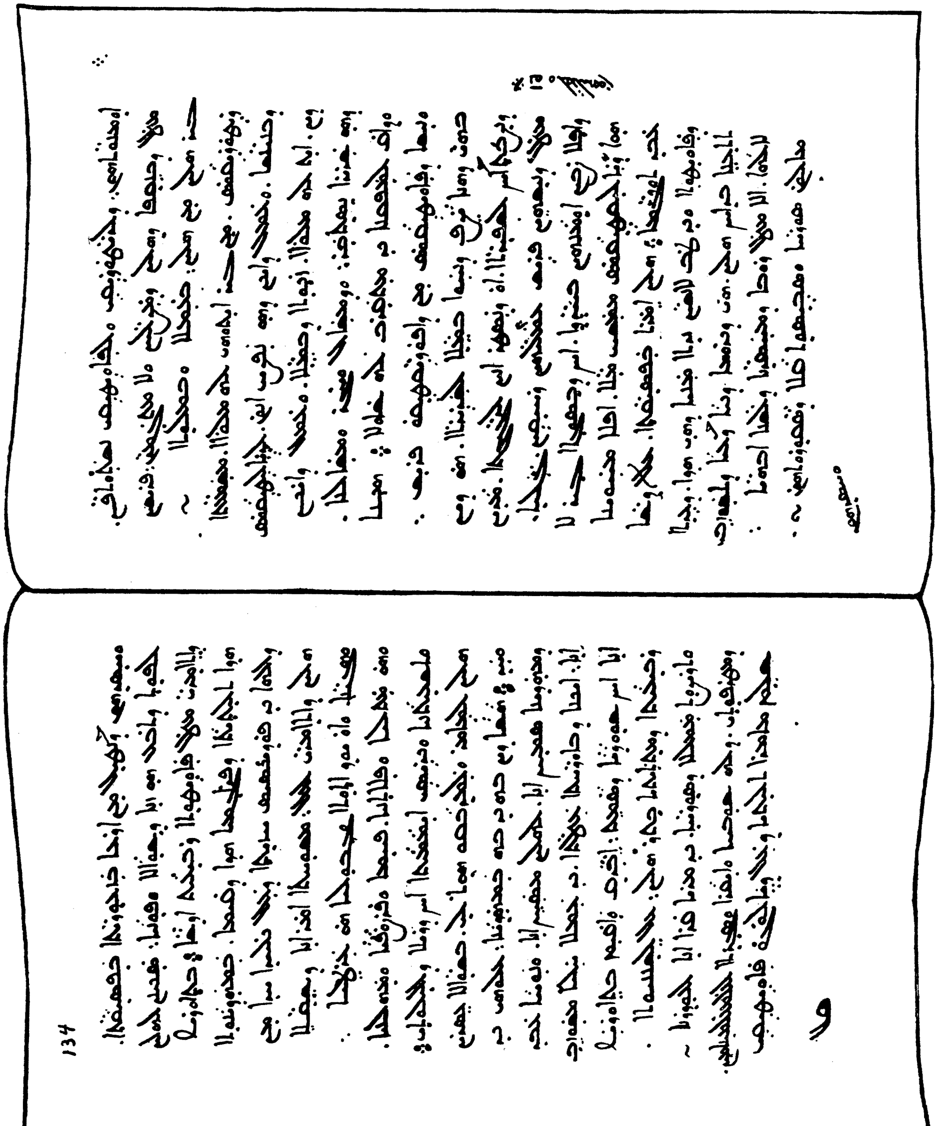
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DIGEST AND NOTES

Question 12.—"What is *gebulja*, and into how many varieties is it divided?" The answer states that "the term *g.* is used of this, that something is made or fashioned," and then, after an inept comparison of the literary process with the making of dough from flour and of clay from clods, proceeds to the definition of the former as "a species of poetic (*depawețe ?*) diction, which is artistic and skilfully devised, so that one thing is said and another intended, be it covertly, or openly." Five varieties are distinguished *maᵇla* (*μῦθος, fabula*); *peleþa* (*παραβολή, similitudo?* rather *ἀλληγορία* and *αἴνιγμα*); *ʿabiduþ parṣopa* (*προσωποποιΐα, personificatio*); simple *gebulja* (*τρόπος, τροπικὴ λέξις, figuratio*, or, since this is the general term, perhaps the species intended is *μεταφορά*); *ʿabiduþ peḥma* or *ṭupsa* (*τύπος, τυπικὴ λέξις*—perhaps *παραβολή*, certainly including it). Frequently, as will presently appear, Severus is clear neither in his expression nor in his conception of the meaning of these terms, borrowed, in his case at second or third hand, from the Greek.

Question 13 takes up the *maþla*. The definition is not clear as it stands, and the text is probably not in order; the "inanimate and irrational objects," about which he says the *m.* is composed, are of course derived from the Greek rhetoricians. His illustrations leave little doubt as to what is intended. The first two are from the Bible, and are not very happily chosen; Matt. 13:31 f. is a parable, and Ezek. 20:46–48 is properly an allegory. Judg. 9:8–15 would have served him better, but was probably not mentioned in his "source"; if it was, then he was carried away by his infelicitous impulse toward originality. The learned Nosephos of Delphi is, of course, Josephus, i.e., Aesop. Nor have the scribe's egregious errors disguised beyond recognition the charming, if somewhat artificial, fable which Gregory of Nazianz wrote to Celeusius (not Basilius; cf. Migne, *PSG*, XXXVII, 209C): Ἐπειδή μοι τὴν σιωπὴν ἐγκαλεῖς [καὶ] τὴν ἀγροικίαν, ὦ καλὲ καὶ ἀστικὲ, φέρε σοι δὴ καὶ μυθολογήσω μῦθον οὐκ ἄμουσον. . . . . Ἐπέσκωπτον αἱ χελιδόνες [ܣܢܘ̈ܢܝܬܐ] τῶν κύκνων, etc. Manifestly it is the *μῦθος*, the fable, more especially the literary fable, which our author has in mind as belonging to and useful for the poet's art. Of no use to the poet, according to Severus, is the common [ܒܪܢܫܝܬܐ], edifying folk tale, of which he gives in his inimitably addled style the following example: A certain shepherd found some bees. And when he went to town to sell them, one of the bees alit upon a drop of honey, coming quietly to eat of it. But the shepherd's dog sprang upon her and killed her, whereupon the innkeeper quarreled with the shepherd. Hearing of this, men of his tribe came to his assistance, and to the other's likewise. And so death and destruction held sway over two mighty towns because of a little dripping of honey. A few words seem to be missing near the end of this section, but Severus is ever quick to say, "Let this suffice thee."

[*To be continued*]